



great blue heron

Ardea herodias

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Ciconiformes
Family:	Ardeidae

Characteristics

An adult great blue heron is 42 to 52 inches long. It is the largest heron in Iowa. Both sexes are similar in appearance. It has a bluish-gray body with white coloring near its head and neck. The yellow-green legs are long and skinny. This bird has a long neck and pointed bill. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an "S" formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body.

Natural History

The great blue heron winters from the southern United States to South America. It lives in marshes, ponds, lakes, flooded fields, swamps, and along the shorelines of rivers. This bird eats mostly fish, insects, and crayfish. It has a low call of "frahnk, frawnk, frawnk." The great blue heron migrates singly or in small flocks at any time of day. Spring migrants begin appearing in Iowa in March to early April. They nest from March through July, usually with other herons in tree colonies called heronries. The nest is a

platform of large sticks arranged in a tall tree. Three or four blue-green eggs are laid. Birds disperse after nesting.

Habitats

interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes; Mississippi River; Missouri River

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

summer: statewide; migrant: statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.